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ABSTRACT

The Arlington (Virginia) Adult Learning System (AALS) represented a model for transitioning adult learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). Involving several service partners who collaborated with the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP), the project illustrated effective ways of linking community-based organizations, adult schools, job training programs, and institutions of higher learning into a coherent system that moved students through a seamless continuum of services. The program served 190 adults during its 2-year duration and reported a 72-97 percent transition rate at the adult school. Outcomes of AALS included the following: the establishment of an educational partnership of ESL literacy providers in Arlington; a comprehensive system that provided continuity from the lowest levels to advanced classes that led to university-level classes; and development of an assessment process that shares data between providers. Partners indicated the greatest impact was on the delivery system that provided a well-coordinated, well-articulated system for learner transition. Teachers reported that students broadened their educational horizons. Students learned to set their sights on larger goals. Key elements for successful collaboration were identified: joint decision making; a commitment to change; respect for each other's perspectives; joint curriculum and assessment framework; and sharing of information. These same features could be promoted as key features that promote the success of transition programs. (YLB)

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Coordination, Cohesion and Continuity: Learner Transition in Arlington

Prepared for
Arlington Education and Employment Program

by Heide Spruck Wrigley

May 1995

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1

Transition in Context

The Arlington Adult Learning System (AALS) was funded as part of a national effort by the Department of Education to support the development of innovative project designed to ease learner transition form basic ESL to academic ESL, employment, or training. Besides the REEP transition program, two other projects were funded, one in El Paso Texas, and a third in Boston, Massachusetts. All three sought to respond to concerns in the field that a fragmented, ill articulated delivery system kept service providers from engaging in collaborative efforts designed to break down various barriers that keep students from moving through the system and move beyond ESL. The original design for the programs mapped out three kinds of barriers that needed be addressed if students were to access programs, advance through the levels, and transition to the next step program. These barriers included:

institutional barriers to transitions (such as competition for funds, lack of coordination between service providers, gaps in services, and insufficient information about other providers).

psychological/social barriers related to disposition factors such as students' believing (or being told) that they are not "college material", lack of confidence in one's abilities, and unrealistic goals (i.e., goals not achievable in the time frame that students had set).

academic barriers related to lack of opportunity on the part of advanced students to develop the kind communication and writing skills required for success in training, employment or academic environments.[1]

[1]In REEP's case, an additional factor came into play, financial barriers. Since the Arlington program does not receive any federal basic education funds, students must pay tuition to receive services. Monies from the demonstration project have allowed students designated as transition students to receive tuition wavers and attend classes for free (since the project ended, this option is no longer available).

In early discussions with service providers, teachers and students additional barriers, not easily subsumed under this framework surfaced. These included "life challenges", such as time conflicts, family responsibilities, the need to balance multiple roles (parent, spouse, worker, students), and having to manage without support from the family or another social safety net. Health issues often made continued participation and learning difficult; and lack of information about available options limit students' educational achievement as well as their goals.

Not surprisingly, economic barriers also played a role in impeding transition. Lack of financial resources brought about difficulties with child care and transportation and made it difficult if not impossible to pay even minimal tuition rates. In some cases, the attitudes of service providers and counselors played a role as well, as ESL students were tracked into remedial and developmental classes - threatening to disappear into what some have called "the black hole of ESL" (see also Wrigley, et al. 1993, and Clymer-Spradling, 1994).

The transition projects were funded to address these obstacles and implement services that would help break down barriers and provide students with the knowledge, skills, strategies and confidence needed to succeed in training and higher education. The three projects have provided the field with insights into "what works" and their experience has led to valuable insights into what it takes to implement collaborative efforts designed to move students along an educational continuum. Final reports on these projects are available from the U.S. Department of Education.

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Program Structure

The Arlington Adult Learning System (AALS), developed in Arlington, Virginia is one of the federally funded demonstration project. Involving several service partners who collaborated with REEP, (Arlington Education and Employment Program), it represents a model for transitioning adult ESL learners. As such, it reflects many of the current concerns about collaboration and offers promising practices to adult educators concerned about providing a smooth path for students from one service provider to another. The project illustrates effective ways of linking community-based organizations, adult schools, job training programs and institutions for higher learning into a coherent system that promises to move students through a seamless continuum of services. It also points to the important role that a lead agency (in this case REEP, the Arlington Education and Employment Program) can play in implementing a strong transition program. The success the project has achieved, as well as the challenges it has faced, speak to policy makers, educators, teachers and students, and its story can provide guidance to those contemplating similar projects. At a time of increased requirements for accountability and greater urgency to collaborate, AALS's experience can provide a starting point for discussion and a basis for planning.

Program Partners

The Arlington Adult Learning System represents a coalition of four service providers who have implemented a comprehensive program designed to help bilingual adults who are not yet fully proficient in English to move from one agency to another. The partners include an adult school, a community-based program, a training provider and a university.

1. **The Arlington Employment and Education Program** (REEP), an adult school, is a special project within the Arlington Public Schools system. REEP serves approximately 2,500 Limited Proficient (LEP) immigrants and refugees through a variety of program components: the Intensive ESL Program; the Adult Learning Center (ALC); a Workplace Literacy Program; and an non-intensive Extension Program. REEP does not receive Adult Basic Education (ABE) monies and is funded entirely through grants and special projects.

2. **Hogar Hispano** is a community-based organization under the auspices of Catholic Charities. It serves the social, economic, educational, and family needs of low-income immigrants in Northern Virginia. Hogar Hispano offers three levels of low-cost, non-intensive basic ESL instruction at nine sites, in addition to assistance with immigration, assistance with food and clothing, referrals and job information, and tax preparation.

3. **The Employment Training Center** (ETC), a program of the Arlington Public Schools, offers free vocational training and placement in office skills, child care, electrical trades and printing. ETC, the primary county vocational training provider, is supported by a number of different funding sources, including JTPA, JOBS, and Bilingual Vocational Occupational Training (BVOT).

4. **Marymount University** is an independent, coeducational institution focusing on liberal arts. It has an intensive English as a Second Language Program designed to prepare non-native speakers of English, for academic study at U.S. universities. In the past, the student body of this program was made up largely of international students preparing for careers in their home countries.

Students Served

The program served 190 adults during its 2 year duration and learner outcomes have exceeded the success rate for the regular adult ESL program. The project reports a 72% to 97%[2] transition rate at the adult school (as measured by transition to the next level or exit from the program for job related reasons) as compared to a 65% success rate in its tuition-based program. The project final report summarizes objectives and accomplishments.

Students enrolled in the AALS were immigrants and refugees whose English proficiency ranged from very little English to good proficiency in oral English but difficulty dealing with academic texts and training manuals. During year 1, 155 students were enrolled in the project and by the end of year 2, 289 learners participated in the transition program.

As to ethnicity, 65% of participants identified themselves as Hispanic; 18% as Asian or Pacific Islanders; 11% as African; 3% as European and .5% as Middle Eastern. In terms of gender and age, 59% of students were female and 82% of the entire group were between the ages of 22 and 44.

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[2]Percentages vary by location

Summary of Objectives

V. SUMMARY OF FIRST YEAR OBJECTIVES (1992-93)
The following chart summarizes the project's objectives, proposed outcomes, and achievements.

SUMMARY OF FIRST YEAR OBJECTIVES		
OBJECTIVE	**PROPOSED OUTCOMES**	**ACCOMPLISHMENTS**
1 To develop an integrated transitional reaming partnership	·Transition criterion for each level and each provider Coordinated activities by each provider including electronic case management linked by phone modem ·Individualized program curricula	·A partnership of ESL Literacy providers has been formed, including a community based organization, a local education agency, a vocational program, and a pre college preparatory program transition criteria for each level and each provider have been established Coordinated Activities have included development of common assessment processes and instruments for placement and transition, development of an electronic case management system to share information on reamers, and development of a transition curriculum
2 To recruit LEP adults in Arlington	·At least 125 LEP adults will be recruited ·Strengthened relationships between community-based organizations, vocational training programs and local universities as well as other agencies serving and working with the target populations	·155 LEPs were accepted Into the protect ·Intensive outreach activities was conducted among the LEP population as well as with agencies and organizations serving She target population
3 To screen potential trainees and place them appropriately along the continuum	·All applicants complete ESL tests; test scores entered in student records ·Interviews completed with applicants eligible to enroll	·Approximately 200 applicants have been screened and have undergone a four step application process ·Applicants have completed individual language proficiency tests ·Interviews have been conducted with applicants to assess interests, needs, and motivation to complete training ·Applicants have been referred to appropriate training or educational component along the continuum Ongoing counseling has been conducted

From: The Arlington Adult Learning System: Final Report
(October 1992 - December 1994)

SUMMARY OF FIRST YEAR OBJECTIVES		
OBJECTIVE	**PROPOSED OUTCOMES**	**ACCOMPLISHMENTS**
4. To provide 300 ESL training slots for 125 LEP adults	·At least 60 slots for beginning ESL and native language literacy instruction at Hogar Hispano (including 45 slots for students transitioning from Hogar Hispano to REEP). ·At least 180 slots for Literacy, beginning, intermediate, and advanced ESL training at REEP and the Adult Learning Center ·At least 24-30 slots for pre vocational training at ETC ·At least 30 slots for pre academic training at Marymount University	·To date, 305 training slots have been provided for 155 individuals. ·15 students enrolled at Hogar Hispano and 69 slots were provided at REEP for 31 students who completed classes at Hogar Hispano and transitioned to REEP for Intensive classes. ·241 slots have been provided at REEP in intensive classes and the Adult Learning Center. ·20 students have transitioned from REEP to pre-vocational English classes at the Employment Training Center. ·29 students have transitioned from REEP to pre-academic English instruction at Marymount University.
5. To provide extensive group and individual educational, career/work counseling	·Participants receive group/individual career/work counseling to help trainees understand work and academic requirements In the U.S.	·An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) has been developed for each trainee. ·Trainees have received intensive group and individual counseling. ·In addition to human resources, trainees have been trained to use and research written and computerized resources dealing with academic and job opportunities.
6. To provide follow-up and support to trainees applying for or accepted into a college -program	·Trainees who are applying for or are accepted into a college program will receive academic support	·An Individualized Education Plan for each trainee has been developed based on general academic skills and/or academic mayor. ·Project graduates have an individual interview and complete a survey to determine their next steps in achieving their long-term goals. ·A plan for follow-up has been developed. ·Individualized, contextualized basic sells, literacy, language support, and TOEFL preparation in the Adult Learning Center was provided for 7 students who completed the Marymount University class in June.

SUMMARY OF SECOND YEAR OBJECTIVES		
OBJECTIVE	**PROPOSED OUTCOMES**	**ACCOMPLISHED**
1. To refine the transition system	·Handbook on developing transition systems ·Refined transition criteria for each level and each provider ·Coordinated activities by each provider including electronic case management linked by phone modem ·Individualized program curricula developed by and drawn from an electronic transitional curriculum developed by the partnership	·A handbook on developing transition systems has been written. · Transition criteria for each level and each provider has been refined. · Coordinated activities have Included: refinement of assessment processes and instruments, refinement of system of sharing information on reamers, refinement of transition curriculum. ·Program curricula have been developed.
2. To recruit LEP adults in Arlington	·At least 75 new LEP adults will be recruited ·Continue to strengthen relationships between community-based organizations, vocational training programs and local universities as well as other agencies serving and working with the target populations	·134 new LEPs were accepted into the project. ·Intensive outreach activities were conducted among the LEP population as well as other agencies and organizations working with the target populations.
3. To screen potential trainees to identify their eligibility, English language proficiency levels, academic goals, Job skills, aptitudes, and job training/field interests, needs, and further educational goals and place them appropriately along the continuum.	·All applicants complete aptitude and ESL test; test scores entered in student records ·Interviews completed with applicants eligible to enroll	·Approximately 175 applicants were screened In a four step application process. ·Applicants completed individual language proficiency assessment. ·Interviews were conducted with applicants to assess interests, needs, and motivation to complete training. ·Applicants were referred to appropriate training or educational component along the continuum. Ongoing counseling was conducted.

SUMMARY OF SECOND YEAR OBJECTIVES		
OBJECTIVE	**PROPOSED OUTCOMES**	**ACCOMPLISHED**
4. To provide 300 ESL training slots for 125 LEP adults (75 individuals new in the second year; 50 Individuals continuing from the first year)	·At least 60 slots for beginning ESL or native language literacy Instruction at Hogar Hispano (including 45 slots for students transitioning from Hogar Hispano to REEP) ·At least 180 slots for Literacy, beginning, intermediate, and advanced ESL training at REEP and the Adult Learning Center ·At least 15-21 slots for pre-vocational training at ETC ·At least 30-45 slots for pre-academic training at Marymount University	·421 training slots were provided for 134 individuals during the second year. ·16 slots were provided for 16 individuals enrolled at Hogar Hispano, and 91 slots were provided for 42 students who completed classes at Hogar Hispano and transitioned to intensive classes at REEP. ·337 slots were provided at REEP in intensive classes and the Adult Learning Center. ·30 students transitioned from REEP to the pre-vocational English class at the Employment Training Center (ETC) ·38 students transitioned from REEP to the pre-academic English class at Marymount University.
5. To provide extensive group and individual educational, career/work counseling, including development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each trainee	Teachers provide: group/individual career/work counseling to help trainees understand work requirements and environments in the U.S. ·Job seeking training and practice on use of job search skills provided to all trainees	·Extensive group and individual counseling was conducted by counselor and teachers. ·An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was developed for each trainee. · Trainees reamed to access written and computerized resources dealing with academic and job opportunities.
6. To provide follow-up and support to trainees applying for or accepted into a college program	·Trainees who are applying for or are accepted Into a college program will receive academic support	·An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was developed for each trainee. ·Project graduates had an exit interview with project staff and completed a survey to determine their next steps in achieving their long-term goals. ·Project graduates were provided with the opportunity for continued counseling. ·Individualized instruction was provided in the Adult Learning Center.

SUMMARY OF SECOND YEAR OBJECTIVES		
OBJECTIVE	**PROPOSED OUTCOMES**	**ACCOMPLISHED**
7. To provide follow-up support to trainees applying for pub training.	·Trainees who are applying for job training will receive support.	·An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was developed for each trainee. ·ProJect graduates had an exit interview with project staff and completed a survey to determine their next steps in achieving their long-term goals. ·ProJect graduates were prodded with the opportunity for continued counseling. ·Individualized instruction was provided in the Adult Learning

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Outcomes and Impacts

The Arlington Adult Learning System has had a significant impact on the service delivery system in Arlington. By setting clear goals, it focused its efforts on transition, and in the process improved the service capacity of the area. In developing a curriculum that spans service providers, AALS required partners to think about transition early on and offered clear expectations for outcome success, increasing accountability in the process. The transition curriculum, aided by strong student-focused case management, set clear goals for both teachers and learners, and in the end raised expectations at all levels, while at the same time providing a supportive environment. As a result, the project increased its success rate not only for students with strong educational backgrounds from their home countries, but for ESL literacy students who had only a few years of schooling, as well. Specific outcomes and partner perspectives on the impact of AALS on the system as well as on participating learners are summarized on the next few pages. These data are based on interviews and discussion groups with partnering administrators and the project coordinator (year 1 and 2), teachers (year 1 and 2), classroom observations and interviews with learners (year 1), as well as an extensive review of the curriculum and other documents.

Outcomes

(1) As a result of AALS, an educational partnership of ESL literacy providers in Arlington has been established. This partnership has led to a greater understanding of the mission and focus of each partner, as well as of funding and reporting requirements. Meetings and discussions between partners continue to take place. As a result, there now exists a coordinated program that links the resources and expertise of individual service providers with the common goal of facilitating learner transition.

(2) For adult learners, there now exists a comprehensive system that provides continuity from the lowest levels (ESL literacy learners served by a CBO) to advanced classes that lead to university-level classes. Although learners are unlikely to stay continuously within the system, participation in the AALS program helps them become aware of the educational opportunities available at various levels.

(3) REEP now has a transition curriculum that spans three levels (basic, intermediate, and advanced - further subdivided into 8 learner proficiency levels); the curriculum contains criteria for transition that spell out the achievements that a student needs to attain before he or she is promoted to the next level (achievements are documented through progress reports). This curriculum constitutes a results-based framework that integrates curriculum, teaching, and assessment.

(4) The program has developed an assessment process through which test scores and other learner achievement data are shared between providers. Through AALS, the development of a joint data base system has begun. This common assessment system can form the basis for a new accountability system capable of measuring learner outcomes and program effectiveness in terms of transition.

Program Impacts: Partner Perspectives

What has been the results of REEP's efforts to build a transition system? Interviews with program partners and a focus group with teachers yielded the information outlined below. According to these internal stakeholders, the most significant outcomes were achieved in two areas: (1) impacts on the system and (2) impacts on learners. Program staff also provided insights into what worked for them and why, which are summarized at the end of this section.

1. Impact on the System

Partners indicated that the greatest impact the project had was on the delivery system itself. Where in the past services were fragmented and providers worked in relative isolation, there is now a well coordinated, well articulated system for learner transition. This system has formed the basis for two regional proposals focused on collaboration to facilitate transition. One such project has been funded by the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee resettlement and another to the National Institute for Literacy is under consideration. Thus a local partnership of providers who serve the immigrant and refugee communities is evolving into a regional coalition which, in turn, can provide a model for future county-wide collaborations.

Examples of Institutionalization

Partners report that many of the efforts of the project have been institutionalized and are likely to result in permanent changes. AALS built its collaboration structures from the bottom up, and as a result, personal relationships developed that are likely to strengthen institutional coordination for years to come. By organizing their collaboration around a clearly defined common purpose, the partners created a network of support designed to foster and maintain institutionalization. As a result of these efforts, the following are now in place:

1. Representatives from the partner institutions will continue to meet to discuss transition issues and share information about programs and services available to Arlington students. Being able to get to know each other and their agencies throughout a two year process has resulted in efforts to publicize each other's programs to the community and provide students with up-to-date information about services. It also has helped to put a human face to the institutions ("We now do much more than just put each other on the mailing list," was one response to the question about impacts.)

Partners also have seen an impact on the referral counselor working in the Arlington Employment Center (a first stop for many students seeking services). Whereas counselors in the past might refer students who needed additional ESL to the community college district (where tuition is high), they now might refer students to REEP where student costs are negligible.

2. For all partners, the program has helped set standards for what it takes to prepare students for transition. Hogar Hispano now uses the REEP curriculum framework (which

is student centered) as a basis for teaching (textbooks formed the core of the curriculum in the past), resulting in a better integration of life skills and language skills. At REEP, students and teachers now consider "Life after ESL" and have come to see ESL as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself, and advanced students who in the past repeated the advanced level, now have "a place to go" and receive preparation for university level ESL or for job training.

3. REEP is implementing its transition curriculum across all levels, seeking to refine the assessment process further and developing common assessment tasks across all levels. Teachers are learning about other institutions and are able to integrate that knowledge into their classrooms. The curriculum now acts as a kind of "scaffolding" that allows students to advance.

4. Hogar Hispano has formalized its job description for ESL teachers and continues to use the literacy curriculum developed by REEP in its classes. New assessment forms have been developed, as well. The community-based organization will also continue to avail itself of the staff development options available through REEP and will continue to help students transition to REEP. The CBO also plans to encourage students with advanced skills to consider REEP as a more appropriate educational option (in the past, many of the advanced learners were "recycled" through the advanced levels since teachers felt that the time and financial commitment required by REEP would constitute a barrier. Hogar Hispano has since found that at least some of these students were able to find time and money needed to advance their education.)

5. The Employment and Training Center is now providing tours of its facilities for advanced level students from the adult school so that they can gain first hand familiarity with the Center. This allows students to imagine themselves taking training courses and gives them the opportunity to talk with former transition students now taking classes.

6. Marymount University has sought and received foundation funds to continue its transition efforts. In addition, the university has expanded its efforts to inform ESL students about the financial aid options available to them and provides extended support in studying applications and filling out form. This step has become a necessity since most of the students who have transferred from the Arlington adult school (REEP) would not be able to continue their studies without tuition support. Marymount also reports a change in the "mind set" of the teaching and counseling faculty who in the past had believed that students in intensive programs could not qualify for federal assistance (they do, as long as they meet other qualifications).

Finally, the relationships and communication structures that have been built during the transition efforts are about to be finalized in Arlington as REEP and the Employment Training Center will be housed in one building. There are plans to have teachers and other staff collaborate in writing grant applications and designing work shops together, ending the "tunnel vision" from which programs that work in isolation tend to suffer.

2. Impact on Learners

Throughout the life of the project, the focus of AALS has been on creating a system that would help learners advance within the ESL system, as well as move beyond it. The results have been highly encouraging. As documented in the AALS final report, the project served 190 learners through its transition program. Yet these numbers do not tell the whole story. Beyond the quantitative data that show high levels of participation, retention, and transition from one achievement level to the next, there is evidence that the program has had a positive effect on the lives of learners.

1. Teachers report that students have broadened their educational horizons considerably and now see possibilities that they had not considered before. ESL learners who had not previously considered themselves "college material" were developing the confidence it takes to seek out advanced education, developed a sense of self- efficacy and, in some cases, were ready to challenge the system (such as questioning placement decisions, for example). In some cases, learners who had been confused about the various ways in which one could obtain credentials in the United States developed both the knowledge and confidence necessary to seek credentials, take advantage of accelerated programs and move toward practicing their profession in Virginia. In other cases, students became aware that in some professions, (teaching and medicine, for example), bilingual abilities are a sought after talent. Thus students who were used to identifying themselves by their lack of English ability, learned to acknowledge and describe their talents, and choose a course of action likely to move them toward job success. The Employment Training Center cited the example of one student, who demonstrated great abilities as an electrician, but was barely able to fill out an application form. As a transition student he received the help he needed in order to take content classes while enrolled in a transitional ESL class.

2. Students attending classes at Hogar Hispano also learned to set their sights on larger goals. Many of these students come to a community setting because it is the most convenient option. While for many of these students, particularly those with little education a community-based organization the most appropriate place, others can benefit from more advanced study or from a program that is more rigorous academically. But a few students moved from the adult school to the CBO, as well. Such "reverse" transition took also place as some students who looked to ESL classes primarily for social contact and as a means to end their isolation were encouraged to transfer from REEP to Hogar Hispano where the curriculum is less demanding.

In addition to these outcomes, the AALS program also resulted in greater efforts by all partners to pay attention to students who formerly might have "fallen through the cracks" of the system. In the past, students were often afraid to try training or academic classes or felt that they were not ready for the kind of formal learning environment. The encouragement provided, in conjunction with monitoring of progress and a steady supply of information on available options kept students in the system who might otherwise have dropped out or been "recycled".

Why Things Worked

Participants identified several elements of the program that contributed to its success. Key ingredients for successful collaboration included:

(1) joint decision making from the start, which resulted in a plan, allowing each partner to benefit from the collaboration; and a focus throughout on students, their

needs and goals. Partners felt that including volunteer coordinators in planning sessions helped to reduce tension and set a tone of collaboration early on.

(2) a commitment to change that included not only the representatives from each agency, but a willingness on the part of these representatives to "go to the top", involve the heads of their institutions, advocate for change and elicit the support of agency heads.

(3) respect for each other's perspectives, an understanding of why things work the way they do in a particular agency, an understanding of the big picture and a willingness to change procedures to facilitate transition.

(4) efforts to secure long term support at the start of a collaboration so that there will not be a gap in services after short term funding expires (AALS was only partially successful in that regard).

(5) a joint curriculum and assessment framework that allows for ongoing monitoring of learner progress and provides "hard" data on program outcomes.

(6) a token commitment from students interested in transition, such as a fee for books or a minimal tuition amount; partners felt that such a commitment helped students be serious about transition and resulted in greater efforts.

(7) bottom up efforts lead by individual programs (but supported by policy makers) that allows programs to develop structures that are appropriate for the local level without being constrained by a predetermined "superstructure".

(8) sharing of information as well as experiences to allow all partners to get a good sense of what it takes for learners to be successful in the new environment. One person suggested that teachers from different agencies "shadow" each other.

(9) joint training sessions for the teaching staff that allow CBO teachers to actively participate and share their perspective on students and teaching. The representative from the CBO felt that community-based teachers must be given the opportunity to contribute actively and showcase their strengths; training becomes less effective if community teachers are only seen as "consumers of training", not contributors to a common effort.

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Lessons Learned

Interviews with representatives from AALS Program (REEP, the Employment and Training Center, Hogar Hispano, Marymount University) revealed important insights into challenges faced and lessons learned.

Setting up a Student Centered System

REEP found it a challenge to set up and maintain a system that provided all transition learners with the full support and counseling needed to transition. While the staff rose to the challenge, (meeting with each student for an extended period of time for at least 12 weeks), helping students set goals, familiarizing them with the educational options available to them, and monitoring their progress, took more time than anticipated.

Staff reported that lessons learned include the importance of integrating some key goal setting and monitoring activities into the curriculum so that teachers can take on some of these tasks. Project partners expect that as teachers gain more knowledge about the system (particularly eligibility requirements), they will be able to provide advice to individual students. (A further possibility would be to help students take up goals setting and progress monitoring through a self-assessment system.)

Managing Student Data

Setting up a computer-based shared data entry and learner assessment system proved to be more challenging than anticipated. As originally envisioned, all project partners would enter student data in a shared MIS system, containing student profiles (including test scores) that could be accessed by each partner. However, the technology was not available to manage a system of that sort. In the end, the decision was made to handle student data the old fashioned way, in the form of student folders that traveled with students as they transitioned from one program to the next. On the positive side, test scores and student data that were extinguished once a student left a program is now maintained and available to other service providers, making a longitudinal study of learners success possible (the third year of funding for these projects - since eliminated - would have made such research a possibility).

Helping Teachers See the Big Picture

As reported in a previous report on REEP (Wrigley, 1994), some teachers initially found it difficult to let go of their students and encouraging them to leave the program

and seek new opportunities. Hogar Hispano in particular found that some of the volunteer teachers were very much attached to "their" students and saw it almost as a betrayal of the program when they were asked to transition students to the adult school. One teacher, reported feeling "like a failure" when one of her students talked about transferring. Teachers at Hogar Hispano had envisioned their program as a feeder to the adult school, but only after students had moved through all available levels (a process that might take four years) and were concerned when told that motivated students with good skills were probably better off attending a more formal and more challenging program. These teachers could clearly see that they were likely to lose the "cream of the crop" of their students and did not cherish that kind of change.

The lessons that were learned from the experience clearly pointed to the need to involve community teachers in early decision making and make them part of the system. As one person pointed out "volunteers often feel that they don't have a say in the system" and therefore are not likely to support developments they see as weakening their efforts. The partners thought that having brought volunteer teachers from the CBO on a tour of the adult school where they might watch classes and talk to students would have alleviated fears that they were abandoning their students to a less caring system. Similarly, allowing CBO teachers to demonstrate lessons that have worked for them might help to integrate them into teacher education efforts.

Dealing with Scheduling Conflicts and Funding Challenges

As is the case in other communities, the service providers involved in AALS all operated under different calendars for instructional settings, resulting in some cases in overlapping classes and in other in temporary gaps in services. While in some cases,

the schedule for special transition classes could be easily adjusted, in others set starting times that involved the larger institution needed to be adhered to. As a result, there was some concern on the part of CBO teachers who saw their students leave in the middle of a cycle to meet the starting date of the adult school. At the university, there was also some unhappiness on the part of students since the summer transition class did not end in time for students to enroll in the fall semester (at the university or at the community college).

The program also faced difficulties as partner agencies underwent changes. The Employment Training Center had to cancel evening training classes due to a cutback in funding, and for a time, the future of Hogar Hispano as a partner was in jeopardy as support from the Catholic Diocese was not guaranteed.

All project partners supported the notion that transition programs need to make an effort to consider possible scheduling conflicts and seek to develop a seamless system that works best for learners. However, they also felt that due to the vagaries of funding and the instability of adult education and training programs, a great deal of flexibility coupled with genuine efforts to try to work out less than ideal solutions were essential.

Preparing Students for Academic Work

Partners dealing with students wanting to transition to training or higher education found that helping students create time and space for study (in and out of the classroom) presented a major challenge. Many of these adults had work schedules and complex family lives that left little time to do homework or review important information. As a result, class time needed to be allotted for review and additional practice. It became clear that some of the goals for rapid transition could not be accomplished under the original

time line since students needed longer than anticipated to achieve the skills necessary for transition. Marymount reported that unlike international students whose life is often guided by "eat, sleep, party", immigrant and refugee students need to deal with family and work responsibilities in addition to academic work - a state of affairs that tends at time to slow academic progress. (The Employment Training Center however reported that in one class students had asked for additional homework.)

Teachers at the Employment Training Center also were aware of the burdens that students carried as they tried to combine training with life responsibilities. One teacher reported that she did not think that students who had night jobs went to bed before coming to class in the morning (evening classes had to be canceled due to funding cuts). In terms of academic progress, REEP teachers found that student writing skills did not advance as fast toward academic norms as hoped. While all students improved in their writing, they did not have enough opportunities to write extensively and hone their skills to the extent that teachers had hoped.

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Implications for the Field

While this report concerns itself primarily with the results achieved and the insights gained by the Arlington Adult Learning System (AALS), it nevertheless reflects many of the issues adult education and ESL programs are facing as they confront future challenges. As policy makers increasingly express concerns about accountability, cost-effectiveness and efficiency in adult education, many communities are facing immediate pressures to coordinate services and build bridges between service providers. Furthermore, block grants often carry with them requirements for collaboration and evidence of joint program planning. The AALS program contains many of the key features that promote the success of transition programs.

Shared Commitment

To build a successful transition program, a shared commitment to make the education and training system work for adult learners is essential. Once such a commitment is in

place, it is possible to develop the various components of a transition system: a curriculum that spans traditional service delivery models, a system for sharing information on learner demographics, educational history and learner goals, a jointly developed assessment framework, and a curriculum that spans service providers.

Successful transition efforts also require respect for individual providers, their experience and their concerns and an effort to find commonalities in spite of individual differences in program focus and philosophy. At a time of limited resources, supporting student transition from one program to another might not be an endeavor that everyone will support, particularly if funds are indexed to student attendance. Turf issues cannot be ignored, but can be mitigated through leadership that sets the tone by making it clear that students come first, helps to provide incentives for collaboration, and tries to set up reciprocal relationships that balance perceived benefits and costs.

Focus on the Learners

Most importantly perhaps, successful collaborations require a sound understanding of learner goals and needs and enough of a flexible approach to respond to learners at various levels of their learning continuum. Nowhere is the range greater as in adult ESL programs, where collaborative efforts need to encompass those who are just beginning to acquire literacy and might need a great deal of support, social contact, and encouragement, as well as those who have credentials from their home countries yet lack the experience and language skills necessary to put these skills to use in the United States.

Communication Structures

Extensive teacher and staff involvement on all sides are key if transition efforts are to take hold. REEP has been able to set up structures that both encourage and command communication across service providers. What started initially as a loose network has matured into a system of formal meetings focused on decision making and joint program development. Setting up a common assessment system has required sharing both information on assessment methods and data on learner goals and achievement.

Staff Development Geared Toward Transition

The Arlington program has demonstrated that if teachers are to be successful in facilitating learner advancement and promoting transition, staff development needs to go beyond having teachers increase their instructional repertoires to include the teaching of transition skills. For teachers to be effective in their new role, they must increase their knowledge base and learn about other service agencies, their focus, their goals, requirements for access, and criteria for success. Only if teachers work together with their students to find out who might best serve a particular group of learners, can they make students aware of the educational opportunities available to them, counsel them in effective ways to access services and attain support, and teach them to advocate on their own behalf.

Efforts to Build Learners' Confidence

While increasing the academic literacy skills required for training and higher education must be one goal of transition programs, increasing the self-confidence of learners and expanding their views of educational possibilities should be another. In fact, the experience of both the Arlington program and those of others has shown that raising the expectations of teachers and staff that students can succeed will result in students' meeting these expectations. Effective use of transition students as role models can help get the message across in ways that are both culturally and linguistically sensitive and help to allay the fears and concerns that non-traditional students have regarding their role in higher education.

Support for Joint Assessment Systems

As the field examines the factors that facilitate successful collaborations, it becomes increasingly clear that a key feature of effective efforts must be a joint data collection and accountability system. While recognizing the necessity of such a system, REEP has struggled with it implementation. As programs try to rid themselves of piecemeal efforts to collect student data and try to build more effective schemes, it becomes increasingly clear that implementation of large scale assessment and data management systems requires a great deal of technical experience and expertise. Individual programs cannot be expected to have this expertise, nor can be expected to have the funds to pay for the development of such systems. If accountability across programs is to become a reality, a great deal of both technical and financial support will be required to help programs get started. However, building a conceptual model for information sharing that requires

programs to decide which instructional goals should be emphasized and which learners outcomes should be documented, lies well within the purview of programs partners, and REEP has indeed been successful in that respect.

Inclusiveness

In many ways, the ESL transition programs funded by the Department of Education resemble the "bridge" programs that promote and facilitate access to higher education for disadvantaged students. The AALS project is new in two respects: (1) it focuses exclusively on the needs of ESL students and (2) it promotes successful transitions at all levels of literacy, not merely at the juncture between advanced ESL and university work or skills training. In including all levels of ESL and literacy, AALS effectively provides a second chance education for those immigrants who have received only few years of education in their home countries while offering higher end academic opportunities for immigrants who have completed secondary school or higher.

Unmet Needs

The shortcomings of the program are slight, compared with its success in implementing a comprehensive transition program. Yet, as always in adult education, there are challenges that have yet to be fully met:

(1) the project has not yet been successful in developing a learner assessment scheme that is computer based and would translate into a county-wide system for assessing learner progress (given the experience of other states, development of such a system demands greater resources than what was available to this project). Had the project been funded a third year, as was originally planned, greater progress could have been made in this direction.

(2) learner outcomes outlined in the curriculum are still somewhat uneven; for example, while the writing sections focus on structure-based skills ("able to write simple and complex sentences"), the oral language section presents skills in context ("able to communicate over the phone on familiar topics"). However, the adult ESL field as a whole struggles with the challenge of creating a framework for learner outcomes that links the demands of the academic, work, and training environments with the basic skills that are necessary for continued academic success. The AALS curriculum provides a significant step forward in outlining what might reasonably be expected from learners who see ESL services as a means to a better future.

Next Steps

Although AALS has been successful as a transition model, several challenges remain if transition efforts are to become truly integrated into the overall service delivery system in Arlington. The challenge for Arlington is to broaden stakeholder involvement and bring together an even larger group of service providers, all focused on a common vision: (1) to facilitate interaction between providers so that a seamless system for education and training can be established and (2) to ensure that the needs of ESL learners are addressed

by all partners in the system and the talents of immigrants who are not yet fully proficient in English recognized. As other programs have found, it is difficult to meet that challenge without committed support (including funding support), but the results merit the investment: a streamlined system with a single intake process, (shared by providers), more efficient reporting requirements, clear outcomes, and greater accountability. The Department of Education might consider using the transition projects to provide technical assistance to other regions and help them develop the tools necessary to develop a transition system. Arlington, on the other hand, might be well served in building on the structures developed by AALS and align such efforts county wide.

Conclusion

As partnerships between educational providers, social service agencies, employers, training providers and community group take hold, transition programs form a gateway that allows adult learners to participate more broadly in a wider range of programs. For ESL students, in particular, who see many years of learning, training, and education in front of them, transition efforts can act as a beacon of hope that guides them on their way and illuminates the road ahead. Teachers who participate in transition efforts have much to gain, as well. Working with staff from other agencies, they gain a fuller picture of the educational opportunities that exist in a community and the obstacles that need to be negotiated if students are to succeed. In developing and implementing the AALS transition model, REEP has succeeded in helping students meet challenging standards and has paved the way for efforts of this kind in other areas.